

For Struggling Bolivia, Barbie Was a Convenient Gift to France

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LA PAZ, Bolivia—One Tuesday afternoon last month, Klaus Barbie took time from his routine in this Andean capital to pay an unsolicited visit to the Bolivian government comptroller's office.

His business was relatively simple: to pay a six-year-old, \$10,000 debt, his sole legal quarrel with Bolivia's new democratic government.

Barbie approached officials and announced he was prepared to pay. But the Bolivians insisted that the dollar debt be converted to Bolivian

currency at the official exchange rate, then widely ignored. Barbie argued for a fairer price.

The result, government officials here say, was that irritated bureaucrats in a minor government agency placed one of the most wanted Nazi war criminals under arrest, to the surprise of the government leadership here and the French and West German diplomats who for years had sought Barbie's extradition.

With that petty argument and ad hoc detention, events were touched off that led to Barbie's celebrated imprisonment in France on charges

of crimes against humanity—and an ongoing controversy in Bolivia about the methods and motives of a weak government's sudden action.

In Lyons, France, Barbie was told yesterday that he faces trial in at least eight cases involving shooting, torturing and deporting hundreds of Jews and French resistance fighters.

United Press International reported that investigating Judge Christian Riss met with Barbie in his solitary confinement cell at St. Joseph's Prison to inform the former Gestapo chief of the specific charges of "crimes against humanity." There

involve Barbie's role in the deaths of 294 French citizens and the deportation to Nazi death camps of 650 others.

Riss was accompanied by Barbie's court-appointed lawyer, Alain de la Servette, who said that Barbie, 69, had "aged considerably in a very short time and refuses except his enforced isolation."

Barbie's summary expulsion by the struggling, left-of-center government of Hernan Siles Suazo has won Bolivia wide praise from European governments at a time when the country desperately needs aid. Gra-

tified French officials say that in addition to an aid package planned before the expulsion, they intend to "lead a campaign for Bolivia in Europe," in the words of one.

In Bolivia, however, Barbie's expulsion is not such a simple issue.

Even as the government has continued to broadcast reports on state television about Barbie's crimes and European gratitude, leading democratic politicians and newspapers

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West Germans watch France
lynch at wartime record. Page A21

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Ex-SS Chief Barbie Chose Wrong Time to Pay a Debt to Bolivia

BOLIVIA, From AP

have questioned the government's heavy charge, making an extradition case in the Supreme Court.

The uncertain legality of the government's later arrests, including holding Barbie incommunicado for 11 days and expelling him on the grounds that his 25-year-old Bolivian citizenship was not valid, have led many Bolivians to conclude that the government acted precipitately in the hope of quieting local fears.

"Almost everywhere it is said that turning Barbie in tends to fortify the ties of friendship with France," the left-center newspaper *Presencia* editorialized. "In other words, Bolivia presents itself in the not very complimentary role of somebody who turned somebody in for a reward."

Bolivian officials say they intended all along to arrest Barbie.

"The right moment came with his arrest because he was in our hands," said Foreign Minister Mario Velarde Durazo. "He is a foreigner completely unopposed in Bolivia. If we released him, we would have had to arrest him again, and he is a dangerous man."

Political leaders here add, however, that Barbie's arrest in January happened to coincide with the Siles government's most severe crisis in its four months.

These difficulties and France's strong influence, they say, caused the reversal in the policy of waiting for a court decision and an equally worldly-wise decision to send him to France rather than West Germany.

Siles government took office last October with many reasons to expel Barbie.

For 20 years after coming to the country in 1951, the former Gestapo commander apparently lived quietly under the alias of Klaus Altmann, managing a lumber mill in northern Bolivia and obtaining citizenship under his false name in 1957.

After his discovery by French investigators in 1971, however, Barbie was limited to Bolivian military movements and personal life by movements. Officials now charge that he was connected to cocaine trafficking interests, and other reports say he advised military leaders on ground and booby-trap tactics, although no proof has ever surfaced.

Soon after taking office, Siles announced

in an interview that Barbie would be expelled if European governments requested it. Yet for almost four months, the Bolivians took no action.

Diplomats interested in the case were told, and that the government intended to wait until the Supreme Court ruled on an extradition request filed by West Germany in May 1972. The court last repeated such a request by France in 1971.

Then, only days before Barbie's arrest in January, the government's leading minority coalition party, headed by popular Vice President Jaime Paz Zamora, left the government after a dispute with Siles, forcing the president into an emergency reorganization of his Cabinet.

Among other things, Paz's party charged that Siles' interior minister had failed to act against a right-wing paramilitary group and incite to violence elements to which Siles himself had linked Barbie publicly.

At the same time the governmental crisis forced the resignation of Paz by Siles to France and Paz to West Germany.

Government officials said congressional

here concede that Bolivia's new democracy is unlikely to survive economically without support from abroad. Siles' administration inherited an empty treasury along with a \$1 billion foreign debt on which no payments had been made in more than a year.

Only three days after Siles and Paz would have arrived in Paris and Bonn, Barbie tried to set up at the comptroller's office, apparently eager to settle any disputes that could have given the government a legal right to rest him. Eleven days later, he was on his way to France.

"It was a political decision," said Paz, who remains vice president. "They had intended to wait for the court, but they needed to do it in that moment both for external and internal political reasons."

But the process of arranging a departure seemed largely, according to sources, because of second thoughts by Bolivian officials over the questionable legal measures.

Then, say sources here, pressure from France's Socialist government helped decide the quick expulsion. Unlike West Germany, France offered Bolivia an easy method of expelling Barbie to Europe through its col-

ony of French-Guyana—eliminating the problem of stopovers by Bolivia's military transport plane in third countries.

More importantly, France was on the verge of agreeing with Siles government on a major package of economic aid—including treasury debt rescheduling. Officials here say that the package was to have been announced during Siles' visit to France and was announced at the very moment Barbie left.

Now officials say that the aid package will be announced with fanfare during a rescheduled trip in the coming weeks. Meanwhile, France will back Bolivian efforts for financial aid in international organizations and type other European countries to help the government, French officials say.

While Bolivian leaders say that political and financial support is welcome, the internal political effect of the expulsion may not be as beneficial.

When in Bolivia is going to worry about somebody like Klaus Barbie at a time like this? said a leading senator in the government's party. "There are 3 million other problems that people are thinking about."